

About COPE

The Indiana Commission on Proprietary Education was created in 1971. The purpose of the Commission is to regulate private occupational schools in Indiana. The Commission's jurisdiction includes most post-high school trade, business, technical, and professional schools. Public universities, most private non-profit colleges, institutions offering exclusively religious training, and schools licensed by other state agencies are exempt from Commission regulation.

The Commission's responsibilities include accreditation, consumer protection, and assisting schools and the public with information and problem solving.

The Board of Commissioners is composed of the following seven members: The State Superintendent of Public Instruction, The Indiana Commissioner for Higher Education. Five members are appointed by the Governor to represent the private school sector and the general public.

The chief executive officer of COPE is the Commission, who, along with the staff, carries out the day-to-day activities of the agency.



Indiana Commission on Proprietary Education

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Private Career Schools in Indiana



Indiana Commission on Proprietary Education

www.IN.gov/cope



Accreditation in Indiana...

All private schools doing business in Indiana must first obtain a status of accreditation with the Indiana Commission on Proprietary Education. To qualify for fully accredited status, a school must meet standards set by the state of Indiana with regard to:

- Admissions practices;
- Content, length, and quality of courses;
- Equipment and instructional materials;
- Qualifications and experience of instructors and administrators;
- Safety and appropriateness of physical facilities;
- Maintenance of student records;
- Financial stability;
- Truth in advertising; and,
- Adherence to an approved refund policy.

Private postsecondary institutions doing business in Indiana must state in their catalogs and promotional literature that they are regulated by COPE and include the Commission's address and in-state toll-free telephone number. Students should look for this statement before enrolling.

Some private career schools are also accredited by regional or national accrediting agencies recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. To be accredited, a school must meet standards set by a group of similar schools. Although accreditation by these agencies is voluntary, it is instrumental in making an institution eligible for federal student aid programs. COPE works closely with these agencies, along with other appropriate stakeholders, in the regulation of all Indiana proprietary schools.

Just the Facts...

Schools

COPE currently has 200 schools on status for operation in Indiana (2006 figures). Of these, 180 are "fully accredited" and 20 are new schools on "applicant" status; 58 of the accredited schools are out-of-state institutions, authorized for recruitment in Indiana.

Enrollment

Indiana's proprietary schools serve more than 30,000 students each year. About 60% of these students are at schools that carry national or regional accreditation. The remaining students are at schools whose only oversight comes from COPE.

Degrees

A growing number of schools offer associate degree programs lasting 18 months to two years. Some award baccalaureate and advanced degrees. Currently, there are about 500 degree programs offered at Indiana proprietary schools across nearly 80 campuses (some from out-of-state, serving Indiana students), and granting more than 3,000 Hoosier degrees annually.

Certificate and Diploma Programs

Indiana's private career schools offer a wide range of courses and programs, currently including more than 200 subject areas. These programs graduate nearly 5,000 students annually in such fields as medical technologies, massage, manufacturing technologies, truck driving, computing, business, and many others.

Graduation Rates

Students in Indiana proprietary schools (reporting federal data) show a graduation rate of more than 50% across all levels, comparing favorably to other educational sectors.

Closed School Student Records

COPE secures and services student records from closed Indiana proprietary schools, responding to more than 1,000 inquiries each year.

A Word About Diploma Mills...

What is a "diploma mill?"

A dictionary definition is "an unaccredited school or college that grants relatively worthless diplomas for a fee." Alternatively, a diploma mill might be described as an institution of higher education operating without supervision of a state or professional agency and granting diplomas which are either fraudulent or, because of the lack of proper standards, worthless.

What to Look For

In today's Internet-based world, with hundreds of higher education institutions of all types offering their programs by distance education, it is often very difficult to know which ones are reliable and which ones are just after the money. Consequently, the more important questions is, "how does someone avoid enrolling in a diploma mill?" The basic answer is that you have to be cautious and you must do some homework.

In general, institutions that grant degrees but are not accredited require more investigation. Additionally, study at such a school probably involves more risk relating to acceptance of the credit and degrees by other education institutions and employers. Check their legal status by contacting the Commission.

Remember, if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.



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